

Hadaya-Vatthu (Heart-Base)

and the views of three most prominent scholars of 20th century Myanmar

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Mahagandhayone Sayadaw U Janakābhivamsa

"Scientific view and the Buddha's Abhidhamma, Questions and Answers"

(မဟာဂန္ဓာရုံဆရာတော် အရှင်ဇနကာဘိဝံသ - သိပ္ပံအမြင်နှင့် ဗုဒ္ဓအဘိဓမ္မာအမေး အဖြေများ၊ စာမျက်နှာ - ၈၂-၈၅)

Question no. 20

Question: The specialists of foreign countries say that mind arises (/becomes) in brain. I have heard that in Buddhism it arises in "*hadaya-vatthu*" (heart). Explain (it to me, master).

Answer: I can't explain it, if I do not know (well) their understanding. Indeed, monks take it in their way. Although it is said that there is "heart-base", it doesn't mean that there the mind depends on it like a being or matter. Haven't I explained just recently? From the day of birth (the person) is born together with the base-matter. Where will be the breast etc. since the day of birth? (The child) comes with heart-base. Because (the child) has the base-matter, mind may arise. If there is no base-matter, there cannot arise mind in the sphere of senses.¹

It is like when a student develops because he has a teacher

Therefore, because the student has a teacher, he develops. If he² doesn't have a teacher, the student doesn't develop. First the student depends on the teacher. Because they have parents, children develop. If they do not have parents, the children cannot develop, (I) say. Then the children do not live in the chest of their parents. It is also not that they would depend (on the parents) as some thing. It is said by the way of speech. In fact, taking the parents as a cause, the children develop.

¹ I.e. the world of deities, humans, ghosts, animals, and hell. Excluded are the twenty worlds of Brahmas, powerful divine beings that feed on rapture of their meditative concentration.

² The Burmese language uses "he" (thuu) for both genders, male and female.

Take it just this way.

Therefore, it is not that mind would be established on the heart-base, when saying that it depends on the heart-base. Because there is the heart-base, the monks by the way of 'dependence-condition' (*nissaya-paccaya*) call it as "depending". If it (the heart-base) is not there, it (the being) cannot arise in the world of senses. That's why we say it "depends". It is not that mind would arrive in the brain. Just because there is brain, the mind arises. Indeed, (we) have to take it just this way. Just because there is heart-base, the mind arises.³

The way how student depends on the teacher.

Take the way how student depends on the teacher (as mentioned before), (when thinking) about the heart-base. He shouldn't go anywhere (taking) the teacher, the necessary stuff, or the (teaching) monk - the student would fall down (under the burden). It is not this way (how a student depends on his/her teacher). The teacher lives in that monastery. Although he (the student) lives in this monastery, he simply depends on the teacher, he listens to the speech of the teacher. 'Depend on the parents' means the parents live in that house, (however) he lives in this house. It is said, that depending on his/her parents, he develops. Although saying (so), it is not that he would depend on the parents. Mind also doesn't depend this way. It doesn't depend on heart-base. It is just that because there 'is' heart-base, brain, the mind arises. Remember it thus.

Brain

Actually, I do not understand it as brain. Why? Because there are ghosts called *kabandho* {ကဝဏ္ဏိ}. *Kabandho* ghost means it doesn't have a head. Although it doesn't have a head, mind arises (in it). In fact, it is not a kind of mind that would depend on brain.⁴ This how I understand it, right? However, I do not want to say they (the foreign specialists) are telling lies.

³ Note that this sentence mirrors the sentence before the preceding one.

⁴ This theme appears several times in the Pāli scriptures. See in Parajika Pāli 4, Vinita Vatthu, the story of the head-less man, a ghost with eyes and mouth on its chest. The Buddha explains this is his kamma for the acts he did as an executioner when he was human.

What the monks accept

The Buddha called heart-base only as 'base'. (The Buddha) did not speak (of it) as 'heart'. In *Dhammasaṅgī*⁵ (the Buddha) speaks of base-matter, (as a) base-matter of dependence. The case of it being in this heart is what is noted in the (later) scriptures. Sometimes, when "DANE" is said (i.e. when an abrupt sound is heard) from here (i.e. in the chest) there is as if a quick knowing or what, isn't it? That's just why the monks accept it (that the mind arises from heart).

It is necessary not to commit misdeeds.

Even though accepting (it so), it is important not to commit misdeeds (*akusala*). Even if not accepting (that mind arises from heart), it is important not to commit misdeeds. Even if accepting, it is important to remember (/ "insert in heart") the Dhamma. Even if not accepting, it is important to remember (/ "insert in heart") the Dhamma. I believe that this is not a very important question.⁶

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Ashin Silānandābhivamsa (D.Litt.)

"The Lectures of Abhidhamma Course, vol.4"

(အရှင်သီလာနန္ဒာဘိဝံသ (D. Litt.) - အဘိဓမ္မာသင်တန်း ပို့ချချက်များ (စတုတ္ထတွဲ)၊ စာမျက်နှာ ၄၁-၄၂)

What do the people say in the modern times? Simply that the Buddha did not teach calling (the base-matter) as 'heart'. So, as it is not heart-base, can't it be brain, right? Indeed, this is not a question which will yield an exact answer. What one likes, he (should) accept, what I like, I (will) accept.

In *Bhasatika*⁷ there is some more said about this little thing. I think in the page 400. "According this Pāḷi (text), obviously, there must be some kind of base-matter. Here should be known, that the base-matter is housed in the heart." This is the explanation of the Sayadaw (U Janakābhivamsa), right?

⁵ The first book of Abhidhamma.

⁶ I.e. regardless whether the mind arises from heart or brain, one should avoid committing misdeeds and try to follow the Dhamma.

⁷ A verbatim translation composed by Sayadaw U Janakābhivamsa. In this case it is perhaps the *Paṭṭhāna* translation.

- When being concentrated on a certain thought, in times when the mind is not satisfied with something, the heat-element (caused) by mind enters in a base(-matter) to depend (on it), and from that base-matter the blood in which the heat-element stays, moves on so as to make the chest (or heart) as if hot.
- Then, when a rough sound such as that of a cannon is heard, in times somebody gets afraid and frightened. Then by the mind-element's trembling, the heart's blood and the chest (or heart) start as if jump.
- When there is a hard suffering or rudeness, the heart (or chest) are as if broken.
- And when there is extreme happiness, the heart (also) seems to do something ("/as if becomes something").

Based (on these cases) it is very appropriate to believe, that the mind's dependence, the base-matter, is established inside the heart ("/in the house of heart"). Then, just because it is established inside the heart, the base-matter is named 'heart-base'.

In modern times, some scientists ("happen to") say that the mind and consciousness are established in brain, based on the return and mixing of hot blood and hot air from the heart-house to the brain.⁸

Audience: That is perfectly correct, venerable sir.

Question: Just as the venerable sir has said, (you) have said there is blood in the heart. The kind of base-matter established and spread in the blood, being of that blood, that is the most important. That blood comes also to the brain.

Sayadaw: Of course, it may come (to the brain).

Question: If that blood can't come to the brain, the person simply dies. Although (the brain) is all the time (a part of) the body, if there is no brain, (person) does not experience anything. I think here is spoken of the blood (which arrives to the brain). I think here is meant the blood spreading (to the brain).

Sayadaw: May be.

Audience: It is very intelligible, venerable sir.

⁸ I.e. the sayadaw apparently believes that all the occurrences in the brain observed by scientists are actually caused by the blood which comes to the brain from the heart-base.

③

Ashin Nandamālābhivamsa (the chancellor of Myanmar's Buddhist Missionary University, ITBMU)

"The Noble Discourse of Abhidhamma"

(ဒေါက်တာ အရှင်နန္ဒမာလာဘိဝံသ - အဘိဓမ္မာ မြတ်ဒေသနာ၊ စာမျက်နှာ ၁၁၈-၁၂၅။)

Base-Matter of Heart

So, what is next? There is also the base-matter of heart. The Nobly-Lord (the Buddha) says in the *Paṭṭhāna* that the matter on which mind depends is the base-matter. The great Ashin Buddhaghosa, being born in the era of the (Pāli) commentators, writes (about it) as base-matter of heart, adding the little word 'heart'. In the *Pāli Dhammasaṅgāṇī*⁹ there is no mention of base-matter of heart. However, in the *Pāli Paṭṭhāna* it is spoken of, calling it 'base' - "aggregates of base, base of aggregates".¹⁰ (The Buddha) speaks of (it) referring to base-matter in the *Pāli Paṭṭhāna*, only by the simple word "matter" ("*rūpa*"). "*Yaṃ rūpaṃ nissāya manodhātu ca manoviññādhātu ca vattanti, taṃ rūpaṃ manodhātuyā ca manoviññādhātuyā ca taṃsampayuttakānañca dhammānaṃ nissayapaccayena paccayo.*" Saying (so), "*yaṃ rūpaṃ*" - "that matter," (the Buddha) speaks (of it) only thus. Then, in the *Pāli Paṭṭhāna*, (the Buddha) speaks (of it) also just as "*rūpa*", matter.

(The Buddha) speaks of the base as the place where the mind arises (/ "stays"). It is good to study and see why the great Ashin Buddhaghosa adds the word '*hadaya*' to this (Buddha's) teaching. The word '*hadaya*' refers to the heart-flesh. In English it is the word 'heart', right? Having said '*hadaya*', the heart is meant. Then, it (also) means mind. In English "heart to heart" means to know one another's mind. Having said "heart", it is not (said) only with reference to the heart-flesh. Sometimes it refers also to the mind.

In Burmese it is also used (/ "said") (that way), isn't it? "This person's 'mind-heart' is good." "(He) is peaceful in (his/her) mind-heart." And so on, it is usually spoken of in combination with 'mind'. It is a habit of saying ('heart') referring to mind.

The great venerable Buddhaghosa, using the word '*hadaya*', (he) asked where is 'this matter', (and) if (we) speak according the (commentarial) scriptures, there is blood in the heart. In the modern times, people know the function of the heart-flesh.

⁹ The first book of Abhidhamma.

¹⁰ "*Khandhā vatthussa, vatthu khandhānaṃ.*"

The heart-flesh beats 24 hours (a day), doesn't it? When the E.C.G. is drawn, it is the heart beat, is that correct? Isn't that correct, right? It may be measured with stethoscope. This heart is immensely important for health. It beats 24 hours (a day) without taking rest. The breathing of nose, as well as the beating of heart, will never take a rest. It is beating even when person is asleep, right?

So, what kind of work is it doing? (People) say that for the sake of circulation of blood in the body, it is as if squeezing and expelling (the blood), by pumping it. Then, where is the matter of '*hadaya*'? If (we) speak according the (commentarial) Abhidhamma scriptures, it is inside the heart's blood. Although that blood circulates (in the body), (here) is meant only the blood which arrives to the heart. How much (of the blood)? Turn ("the dear") palm (of your hand) up. Shrink (the palm) little bit, curving it (i.e. close it a little, making it cupped). If you pour ("/"add") water in thus cupped ("/"curved") palm, (you) may get certain amount of water. That amount is in Burmese called 'one enclosed hand', 'one bent hand'. (It) is said, that such is the amount of blood where is the base-matter of heart.

However, saying 'heart-base', it doesn't mean blood. It also doesn't mean the heart-flesh. This base-matter of heart carries out (the function of) the mind's support. Not even so much as the entering of eye called "eye-door" (in case) of an eye seeing a visible object. (It) is said, that upon the heart-matter is established the mind of life-continuum (*bhavariga-citta*), called "mind-door", which is up to where (the heart-matter's function) may reach.

Some (people) in modern times are thinking about this dependence and arising of mind in the heart. It is not that heart feels ("/"knows"). The brain feels ("/"knows"). Some (people) understand knowledge only as (arising in) brain. They also believe that feeling ("/"knowing") (arises) only from brain. Then, saying so, they doubt whether this base-matter of heart is true.

However, with regards to this "little" (idea that) the mind does not arise in heart-flesh, if we look at it with common sense, when a frightening image is seen with eye, doesn't there happen in the chest a "DEIK" (i.e. a shock)? Having heard a bad news, doesn't there happen in the chest a "DEIK" (i.e. a shock)? Also, when the ear hears, "DEIK" simply happens. And if a happy news is heard, then where is first jumping - the heart first jumps (palpitates), right? Seeing so obvious fact, it is possible that also the great venerable Buddhaghosa used the (term) heart-base (in this sense).

(Explained) in other way, 'heart' refers to mind, 'base' means 'abode & support', 'support of the mind'. Then, the support of mind is either the heart-flesh or brain. Whatever the place, it is where the mind appears. As for the Nobly-Lord, (He) didn't say which place it is. Thereafter it is possible to think of it in other way, different than the (Pāḷi) Commentaries' explanation of (mind) based in heart-base, in the afore-said around a half-fistful of blood.

If it is so that 'heart' means 'mind', then the 'heart-base' is the abode of mind. It can be the heart, it can be the brain, as (you) wish. Why? Love, hate - (they) appear only in heart. (But) if you think and ponder over something very complicated, (you) will scratch (your) head? (Or your) abdomen? (You will) scratch (your) head. Because (you) make use of (your) head when thinking, (the mind) arises in the brain. Alright?¹¹

Whatever the people think about, (they) scratch the (dear) place between their eyebrows, scratch their (dear) head, pondering - "How could this be done well?" Where are the ideas and knowledge then coming from? They come from the head. Saying so, 'heart-base', 'heart', mean mind. Base means 'abode'. There are ideas that (maybe) because of these reasons the Nobly-Lord called this matter as 'base' (only).

It should also be said, that the great venerable Buddhaghosa was not wrong, (calling it) '*hadaya-vatthu*', adding '*hadaya*'. There may be found a meaning for it as the abode of mind. '*Hadaya*' means mind, '*vatthu*' means abode. It does not refer to the heart-flesh. In the people, the manifold mind is in the heart-flesh and in the brain. Love and hate are in the heart-flesh, pondering over, thinking, is in the brain. (We) have to say, that (mind) arises in both of them together.

Do (you) grab (your) head when being happy or sad? (Or do you) grab (your) abdomen? (You) grab (your) breast, right? There is pressure on the heart. If (you) are happy, a pressure arises in that place. If (you) are disappointed, (you) scratch (your) head, right? The base-matter of heart means that (the mind) is established in the place from which the mind arises - this way (we speak) quite in accordance with the wish of the Nobly Buddha, Why? Because the Nobly Lord said (one's) experience/feelings arise "*yaṃ rūpaṃ nissāya*" - dependent on that matter, the element of mind and the element of mind-consciousness (arise). (The Buddha) spoke (of it) as "that matter", so simply. (The Buddha) did not say where it is, right? Because (the Buddha) did not say (it), it may be said thus, that the matter is there where the mind arises.

What is the problem in saying that the base-matter of heart is in the blood of the heart-flesh? There are (cases when) people's heart is transplanted (/ "exchanged and replaced"), mechanic hearts are installed, surgery is executed on the heart - these cases also demand consideration. But anyway, (having said) before, that (the mind) is established in the blood, in the false (mechanic) heart there is, indeed, also just blood, right? If the base-matter is in the blood, then all the mind pertaining to blood will arise, right? If there is (no) blood, nothing is possible indeed.

Therefore, wherever it arises, if (we) speak in words (most) people know: love and hate - heart-flesh; pondering, thinking - brain. If (we) say that (the mind) arises between these two, we may get an attitude that all (people) may accept.

¹¹ It should be noted, that the audience of Sayadaw Nandamālābhivamsa are people of various strata of society, educated, uneducated, literate, and illiterate. Hence no elaborated scientific scrutiny should be expected in the explanation.

If the Nobly-Lord spoke (of it) as '*hadaya-vatthu*', there would be no need to think (about it). The Nobly-Lord didn't speak of it as '*hadaya-vatthu*' directly. In *Paṭṭhāna* (He) spoke of it only as '*vatthu*', saying just '*yaṃ rūpaṃ*'. However, it is important that (He) said that the mind called 'mind element' and 'mind-consciousness element' depend on matter.

Then, there is in people's stream-of-consciousness base-matter of heart as the support of certain (kinds of) mind. And where is this conjured from? The *kamma* conjures it. The heart-base, also, is built out of at least 10 (kinds of) matter. A kind of unity of ten. There must be ten. Taking nine including the life-matter (*jīvita-rūpa*) as basis, and one being the base-matter of heart, all they are together. There are ten (kinds of) matter that arise caused by *kamma*. It should be remembered that the ten are together. Counting them, there are eight of the basic matter explained (in the previous chapter), add also the life - (they are thus) nine, (then) the masculinity or femininity, and then add the heart - and they are ten.

(translated by monk Sarana (Czech) on 29th of June, 2015)